

Blind Love

BY KATHARINE HILL

SHEILA had barely voice to explain to the butler that Mr. Cary had sent for her; even the portals of his big house daunted her. She followed diffidently in the servant's wake when he reappeared silently between curtains and murmured that his master was ready. She sent frightened, circling glances about each luxurious room as she passed through it. But when the butler opened the library door for her and, having announced, "Here is the young woman, sir," withdrew from the scene, Sheila's nervousness was swept away in the rush of indignant pity that took her and shook her.

He was deep in a black-leather armchair beside a fire whose red coals could give him only warmth now. At the man's voice, he stirred and turned a little uncertainly toward the door.

"From the office?" he demanded; "oh, good morning, Miss—"

"Burns," Sheila supplied huskily.

"You understand I can't see you," he explained, almost apologetically. "Perhaps you'll take your things off and make yourself comfortable—and let me know when you're ready to take a letter?"

"Yes, sir."

She drew the pins out of her hat and took off her gloves, bending on the man who could not see an anguished, devouring gaze. Her stenographer's note-book was in her bag, and two pencils, having four points between them. She drew a chair to the corner of a table near him, fluttered her covered pages till she came to blank ones, and announced in the breathless, throaty tones that her shyness produced:

"All ready, sir."

He had a rich, authoritative voice, masculine but musical, a voice with a touch of the South about it. He dictated a number

of letters that had to do with his necessitated withdrawal from business activities. He dictated them well, with a sure choice of words, and with the picturesque departures from commercial phrasing which for Sheila had first raised the occasional writing of his letters outside and above the dull routine of business—although, indeed, she had never found business dull while Bruce Cary was a part of it.

It hadn't often happened that she was called on to take his correspondence. His work being of a sort which required little clerical assistance, he had had no stenographer assigned to his own service, but had called on whichever girl was least visibly busy when he wished a letter written. He had scarcely differentiated the various unobtrusive young women who came to sit opposite him with their narrow note-books and their dancing pencils. He found it difficult to remember their names. Sometimes he was vaguely pleased by a graceful pair of hands, or vaguely irritated by the coruscations of composite diamonds; but he seldom looked above them.

Meanwhile, if the owner of the hands chanced to be Sheila Burns, she was probably wondering if he could hear her heart-beats, reveling in each brief moment that kept her near him, and filling her eyes, in every interval that allowed her to raise them, with a new impression of his carelessly carried, attractive person, his distinguished head, his fine and virile features.

II

HAVING finished his business letters, Cary hesitated a moment.

"This is a different sort of thing," he said at last. "This is the sort of letter I shouldn't dictate if I could write it any other way. Since I have to dictate it, I'd

rather do it to an indifferent person, like yourself—don't you know?—than to any member of my family. I'm sure you understand."

"Yes, of course," Sheila murmured, but she was surprised when he began, "Dear old man," for she had fancied that this was to be a love-letter.

He checked himself to give her the name, Dr. Paul Gilman, and the address, that of an English war-hospital. Then he drummed noiselessly on the leather of his chair for some seconds, before beginning to talk out his heart to her "indifferent" ears.

"There's mighty little that can be said to any purpose, to a man in a situation like mine, but your letter said it all—and then some. I wish you didn't have to be in England, or that I could be there too. Your friendship is the one thing left to me on this planet that seems to have any meaning or value now. And then I stop and ask myself why you should worry about one man who's gone blind, with the hundreds or perhaps thousands as badly off, or worse, among whom you're working. They're enviable, though, from some points of view. An arm or a leg more or less can't make much difference, with one's eyes gone; and if I had given mine for some splendid cause, I think the darkness wouldn't seem nearly so dark!

"But part of your letter went pretty wide of the mark—that about the best thing in life being mine still. I'm not going to be married, Paul. Dorothea has—well, she has thrown me down. I don't want you to blame her, even in your thoughts. She's only a kid, and it was her mother and I, talking the whole thing over together, who decided it was best to call it off. I don't think she was ever what I'd call in love with me, because, of course, if she had been, she wouldn't have acquiesced in the decision; I know that as well as you do. I had counted on making her love me after we were married—an easy enough thing to do with an inexperienced girl who likes you to begin with; but what I might count on doing when I was myself, sure of myself, needing no pity or help from any one on earth, is a different thing from what I can hope to accomplish now. Women are sorry

for me now, Paul—that's pretty hard on me, isn't it?"

He broke the thread of his letter to ask of Sheila, so casually, so indifferently, that he almost caught her off her guard:

"Are you sorry for me, Miss—Barnes?"

She had a little inspiration, and shot out at him fiercely:

"No! I'm angry for you, though!"

"Angry?" he repeated, puzzled.

"At God—or the universe," she explained, flushing at her own temerity.

"Why, that's awfully good of you, Miss Barnes," Bruce said, touched by the understanding of this girl whom he hadn't visualized or apprehended. His own cheeks darkened as he realized the intimacy of the revelations he was making to her. Well, this forced abandonment of every reserve was only another of the endless pains of blindness. He made a successful effort to forget Sheila and think only of Paul Gilman, and resumed his dictation.

"I remember well enough how I used to feel toward blind people—sorry for them, of course, so sorry that it hurt me, and awfully anxious to get away from them! There's something intolerable about the mere neighborhood of a blind person—the uncertainty, the helplessness, the constant claim on one's sympathies. I'd never ask a woman I cared for to stand what life with me would be.

"You'll be casting about in your mind for a successor to Dorothea—or a predecessor, more likely. Of these, the one that you will think of first has married since, and Edith has her children to attend to. As for some one new, my conclusion is this—a blind man may possibly keep love, but he can't inspire it. And I suppose he needs it more than any other wretch on the globe. So you see the 'best thing in life' goes by the board, with all the other things, except your friendship and that of three or four other good men—"

"Mr. Cary!" said Sheila Burns.

She was trembling, very slightly, through all her girl's body. For the last several sentences she had been making no pretense of taking down his words.

Bruce broke off, a little annoyed at the interruption.

"Yes? What is it?" he inquired sharply.

Her hands were very cold as she laid them together on her open note-book. She was staring straight into his sightless face as she found the incredible courage to stammer out:

"Why, I love you, Mr. Cary!"

"What's that?" he echoed amazed.

"I *do*!" said Sheila desperately.

"I think I must have misunderstood," Cary said with laborious politeness. "Would you kindly say that again?"

Having made her plunge, she could only essay to swim.

"You said that no woman would love you, that every one wanted to get away from blind people, and that they *needed*—love. Mr. Cary"—her tremulous voice was gaining strength now, charged and changed with the sincerity of her emotion—"I've loved you almost since the first day I came to work in the office. I'd have worked for nothing, just to see you like that. It—it was just everything in life to me. Of course, if it hadn't been for this, you would never have known it. I'd have gone on—feeling so, but I'd have died before I'd have let you guess it. But now, if I *could*—if—if—"

She stammered herself into silence, suddenly frightened to realize what she was saying, suddenly sheering off from the final offer of herself, in words, that was yet implicit in all that had gone before.

Bruce sat very still, his eyebrows twisting together over his shut lids.

"You don't know what you're saying," he pronounced. "What sort of a bargain are you proposing? Don't you understand that I have nothing to offer you, nothing? Although my engagement has been broken by mutual consent, I am still very deeply in love with Miss Scofield. You—you come here and tell me you love me—why, girl, I haven't even any clear impression of what you look like! Don't misunderstand me. I'm not belittling what you seem to be offering me; I'm only trying to show you how pitifully little I have to give on my side."

"All I'm asking is that you'll let me stay with you and do things for you. Of course, I knew about—Miss Scofield. I've seen

her. She came to the office one day—do you remember? Of course, you couldn't be in love with *me*. I know better than to expect that; but wouldn't it be something to have a person wait on you, not for money, but because she'd rather be doing that than anything else in the world? Oh!" She left her seat impulsively and dropped on her knees beside him, so that her face was on a level with his. "You'd be making me so happy, if you'd only let me!"

She touched his arm timidly. His other hand came over quickly and closed on hers.

"You're talking very foolishly," said Bruce, not so harshly as he intended.

Ten minutes earlier she had been to him a mere machine, as impersonal, as unconsidered, as her own typewriter. Now, with her hand clasped in his, with her eager offer of love and service still sounding in his ears, she had become a heart-shaking enigma, a temptation to be resisted, or, possibly, a haven to be entered.

The touch of hands may be an intimate thing, a revealing thing, even when as an indication of character it is secondary to the fuller apprehensions of the eye. For Bruce the mere feel of this girl's palm and fingers answered most satisfyingly his first selfish question—would the companionship she offered him be agreeable to himself? It was more than a matter of smooth, warm skin, of capable, ringless fingers, or knuckles neither too bony nor too plump. Sheila's hand spoke to him of a hundred subtle sympathies, of a nature keyed to meet his own, of a physical electricity whose wavelengths matched his. He felt a warm rush of liking for her with the mere contact.

It was true, as he had said to his friend, that the sudden defection of Dorothea Scofield had left his life quite bare of love. His family consisted of a married sister, a much older and very busy brother, and a nephew at college. Such men as Bruce Cary make many friends, but their friends are usually, like themselves, men of affairs, with the smallest margin of time at their own disposal. Life, as it stretched before him, had a lonely aspect.

"This is all nonsense, you know," he told Sheila. "Some day you'll meet a nice, upstanding young fellow who'll start things

right by saying to you the things you've been saying to me—somebody who'll be able to dance, and take you around, and give you the good times you've a right to. You must just run home now, and forget all about me and what you've said to me—and I'll forget all about it too. Asking a man to marry you! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

As he uttered these sensible words he loosened the grip of his fingers over her hand, and pushed it from him. He would not have believed, a few minutes earlier, that the simple action could cost him an effort, but it did.

For a moment there was silence in the library. Sheila had stumbled back to a chair, and sat nursing the hand he had held and repulsed, looking down at it curiously. Then she began to laugh—a half-hysterical laugh that had yet a note of genuine amusement ringing through it.

"If you hadn't said you didn't know what I looked like," she gasped, "I'd think you were trying to be unkind—talking about 'somebody' that will marry me some day! Mr. Cary, I'm—I'm *awfully* plain. I'm so plain that the only kind of man—that would ever be likely to marry me—would have to be a blind man. Think about the stenographers at the office—you didn't remember my voice, but try to remember what the ugliest girl down there looks like, and then say whether that girl isn't lucky if she ever gets married at all!"

He frowned toward her, while a face that he had seen at the office drifted unwillingly back to his call. Yes, he had noticed that girl. Her eyes were too close together—a trait he particularly disliked. She had a sallow skin, a sullen mouth, and a chin that was noticeably too short. Of her hair he remembered that there were broad, grayish streaks in a graceless jumble of black.

Sheila's voice, now that fright had left it clear, was touched with the magic of youth; it had a reedy quality, soft, sweet, and sincere. It seemed terribly unfair that a girl with a voice like that should be handicapped by possessing the face that he now remembered.

Oddly, the fact that she was so handicapped struck Bruce as a cogent argument

in favor of the arrangement she had urged. After all, this fifteen-dollar-a-week stenographer would become Mrs. Bruce Cary, mistress of two handsome houses and a large income. He could give her luxuries—jewels and furs and automobiles; and social consideration must be hers, whether she sought it or not.

It did not occur to him that these things, rather than himself, might be the objects of Sheila's suddenly revealed devotion. He would have felt himself competent to penetrate such a deception before his blindness, and he had a new sensitiveness now, almost a new sense, by which he tested the sincerity of others. Moreover, what adventure, making a sudden wild play for fortune by marriage, would describe herself as hideous to the eye?

Indeed, pondering the unlovely face from which he had averted his eyes when he had dictated to its owner, Bruce's heart sank for just a moment. Then it rose again, as he remembered that he would never see his wife's features. For him, she might wear whatever aspect he chose, whatever bloom and radiance he liked to bestow upon her. The fancy caught his imagination, and he smiled suddenly.

"Oh," cried Sheila, with a shiver of happiness through her voice, "you will! You're going to do it! You'll let me stay!"

By her quick breathing he knew that she was near again. He fumbled for her chin, found it, and tilted her face toward his. Deliberately, so holding her, he evoked a face to match her voice—a face purely modeled and wistful, sweet-lipped, wide-browed. Resolutely he put away his blurred conceptions of Sheila's real appearance. The face that he kissed—the face that he would always kiss—was the wide-browed, lovely countenance of his own imaginings.

III

A BLIND man with wealth and a devoted wife may find many alleviations in his misfortune. Books and music remained to Bruce Cary; for exercise, walking and rowing. Sheila knew a marvelous method of typewriting by the sense of touch alone, and she taught him to have eyes in the ends of his fingers, as she had. Never, in his

presence, did she weep over the weird chaos of letters, punctuation-marks, and figures which he laboriously spread on countless sheets during the first weeks.

In time he recovered the power of setting his thoughts on paper without the medium of another person—a great advance. It was not to spare herself work that Sheila taught him; she was with him always, forestalling the hundred little humiliations of his helplessness, divining every need before he must express it, so that he had only to accept services, never to ask them.

He was amazed, too, to find that he could still take an effective interest in some public questions, that, although a blind man might be a wet blanket on a social gathering, there were certain problems of human welfare so fascinating to those concerned about them that the handicap of one party to the discussion was soon forgotten. Sheila shared these new interests as well as the others, and discovered a resourceful imagination, a logic, and a clear common sense that forced from him an uneasy respect.

There were times, however, when he treated her harshly, repulsing her attempts to occupy or entertain him with savagery or the bitterest sarcasm. Afterward he would try to denounce himself, but was never allowed to proceed very far.

"You're not cross any more; that's enough for me," she would interrupt. "It was your pain speaking, not you—don't I know that? Perhaps you feel all the better for getting it out of your system. Let's try this new Caruso record!"

There were times, too, when the horror of perpetual darkness conquered him, and his grip on Sheila's hand, he thought, was also his grip on sanity. At these times, and at many others as well, he marveled helplessly that she should be willing to care for him, that the hour of his uttermost need had brought her to him, and he stood aghast to remember how he had hesitated to accept the gift.

From much brooding he now had a distinct picture of her always with him. He seemed to know her broad-browed, fine-featured face in every angle, upturned, in profile and back profile, brilliant in the

sunlight, shadowy in the dusk. In these days he gave very little thought to Dorthea Scofield.

One morning Sheila, opening his mail and laying aside for her own later attention bills, receipts, and circulars, came on a letter from Dr. Paul Gilman. She began to read it aloud forthwith. Bruce heard the first few lines appreciatively; then she broke off with a sharply caught breath. Her eye had outrun her voice, and a sentence farther down the page leaped out to startle her.

"Oh!" she whispered, and looked from the letter to Bruce in nervous uncertainty.

"Go on! Go on!" he urged.

She leaned toward him and read quickly, in short rushes of words cut by her panting breaths:

"I am practically certain you can be cured. There is a Scottish surgeon here who has worked out a treatment that he has applied successfully in over sixty cases, and many of them—I have studied his records—presented greater difficulties than yours. You know, this war has taught all of us a lot, has offered opportunities for experiment such as we never knew before, has forced us to experiment on the most radical lines, where the success of an experiment may have been the man's one-thousandth chance for life. I am writing very fully to Dr. Haswell. You must give the thing a try-out, anyhow. You risk nothing, and I consider you have every prospect of recovering your sight."

"Old Paul!" muttered Bruce, after she had ended. "He wouldn't get my hopes up for nothing. He's as clever a surgeon as the town held, himself. If he writes me that—Sheila, if he writes me that, there must be something in it!"

His hand shook as he reached for the letter. He sat turning it between his fingers in a gesture half-nervous, half-caressing.

"You'll—try it, then?"

"Will I? But, of course, I mustn't be too hopeful. I mustn't get thinking I'm cured already. There might be all sorts of complications. Here, read that again, will you, Sheila?"

But it was hard not to give way to hope when, a little later, Sheila was called to the telephone to speak to Dr. Haswell. Bruce's physician stammered with excitement over

the Scottish surgeon's new method. While interpolating some cautious professional discouragement, he seemed as anxious as Bruce himself could be to make a trial of it as soon as possible.

Sheila made the arrangements for her husband's removal to the hospital with her usual quiet efficiency. Bruce spoke a thought that was hers as well when he said, with a hint of swagger at the back of his voice:

"Perhaps this is the last time you'll have to arrange for me like this, Sheila, as if I were a baby or a parcel! Perhaps I shall come out of the hospital a man again—a whole man!"

There were weeks to be gone through first, however—seemingly endless stretches when, although every augury was good, yet, since the gift of sight was not yet Bruce's, he thought he had lost all hope that it would ever be his. He hadn't realized, until he was set adrift in those empty wastes of time, how full Sheila had made his life with varied and healthy occupations. He said afterward that he hadn't understood, till those last weeks of his blindness, what it really meant to be blind.

Then a day came when he could see the blackness of his own eyelids under heavy bandages in a darkened room. At long intervals degrees of light were admitted through shutters and shades; and when full day was around him, fold on fold of the bandages was removed.

"*Sheila!*" cried Bruce, when a dull reddish tone swam into his dark.

"She's not here," said the nurse. "She left a few minutes ago. She wanted to have everything ready for you at home. You know we expect you to leave us in an hour or two now."

For just a minute he felt childishly hurt, childishly angry that she was not there, that she hadn't wanted to be with him, hadn't divined that he would want her to be with him, in that good hour when he should have his eyes again. Then his heart contracted, as he remembered.

She couldn't now that he had been fancying himself the lover of a fairy princess, that he had a cruel adjustment to make of his deliberate misconception of her

to the prosaic reality. But she did know—indeed, she had told him with almost morbid emphasis—that hers was the least beautiful of faces; so it was natural enough that she had shrunk from showing it to him again here, under the eyes of strangers. He understood, and felt that she was right.

Of course he loved her; but he knew, being only a man, that he would have to watch himself during that moment of their meeting. He might better put a knife into her heart than show, by the quiver of an eyelid, by the uncertainty of a gesture or the hesitance of a tone, that the sight of her poor face was disconcerting to him. He must go to her as any husband to the wife whose dear looks have won him and kept him, must kiss her hungrily, and meet her eyes with unreluctant directness. He had always disliked eyes that were set too close together, but—

Presently they removed the last bandage, and it was as if all the objects in the world were trying to crowd up against his eyeballs. He had to wince back behind puckered lids and sheltering palms, venture out again, retreat to shelter for another respite, and so on until the world drew off into its proper focus, and he could front it at last under level brows, once more a man among men.

IV

SCHOOLING himself, watching himself, Cary drove home, hurried up his own steps, oddly strange, strangely the same, and heard the congratulations of his delighted servants; but he did not hear the voice of Sheila, did not catch a flutter of her skirts.

"Oh, Mrs. Cary told me to give you this, sir," said the butler tardily. "She went out a little while ago."

He took the envelope, stared at his own name in an unfamiliar handwriting which he thought he would have known for hers among a thousand letters, and tore it open.

DEAR BRUCE:

I have just telephoned Dr. Haswell, and he says that the treatment has succeeded—that you can see now as well as he or I. I am glad! I cannot tell you how glad I am. I hope you will be happy and successful in every way. You will be, I know.

Bruce, you don't need me any more. I am

going away, and sha'n't say where, because I know you wouldn't let me go so easily. You'd be sorry for me, and would pretend you wanted me—though we both know, though we married in full understanding, that you love another woman.

You can divorce me for desertion. It isn't the shortest way, and it will mean going to some other State; but I couldn't charge you, a blind man, never stirring out alone, with any unfaithfulness, and I am not going to pretend that I believe you would agree to accuse me.

Good-by, Bruce. I am glad about your eyes!

SHEILA.

He was shaking with anger as he finished reading—anger assumed in sheer self-defense against the intolerable pathos of her letter. He crushed the sheet in his hand and turned on the man.

"Where did she go?" he demanded savagely. "Where did Mrs. Cary go?"

"I d-don't know, sir. She just gave me that envelope and walked out without another word."

"On foot? She hadn't ordered the car?"

"No, sir. She was walking, sir."

Bruce made a gesture of despair. She had gone wilfully to hide from him. She, who had been as constantly near him, as readily at his service, as his own right arm, was of a sudden out of reach, ravished away into space.

He wanted her back. He wanted to take her by the shoulders and shake her like an exasperating child. He wanted to shout at her that he desired Dorothea Scofield exactly as much as he desired a well-dressed wax lady out of a shop-window. He wanted to tell her that since only a congenital idiot could live with a man for more than a year without discovering that he loved her, she must have planned this infernal surprise with the deliberate object of spoiling his first day of regained sight for him—a day which he thought might have been celebrated in some fitter fashion. And yet, under all the rush of generous indignation that he thus shaped into telling sentences, there lay, unrecognized, denied by him, a furtive feeling of relief that he was not to face her at once.

It was like a woman, he reflected bitterly, to arrogate all the nobility, all the sacrifice, all the common decency, even, to herself. It was like a woman to conclude, without

giving him a chance to refute her, that he could use her as a life-saving staff in his need, and throw her aside when he came to smooth going.

Perhaps she was even plainer than he remembered her; for his mental picture of her had always been vague, at best. Perhaps no man could love her. Had Bruce ever really loved her? Deliberately he had substituted another appearance for hers, pleased himself by fancying beauty at his side. After all, the exterior must in some sort represent the soul, and in falsifying her image he had surely raised a barrier between her soul and his. He had loved a composite—a voice, a gentleness, a devotion that were Sheila's, and a face with another expression, with the stamp of a different character.

It remained clear to Bruce that he must find her, must profess himself her lover, must forget the dream Sheila, and must discipline himself, if it were necessary, into loving the actual one.

There were a number of immediate practical steps to be taken—consultation with a detective agency, the insertion of a carefully worded "personal" in all the newspapers, a visit to the office, and a cross-examination of all the girls there who had known Sheila Burns.

The detective agency confessed itself at a loss when Bruce admitted that he had no photograph, no data on height, weight, identifying peculiarities, or even the color of the eyes—nothing beyond a general description that might fit tens of thousands of women. Worse still, there was every reason to think that the missing lady might use some fictitious name.

The personnel of the office force was shifting. There was only one face there that looked familiar to Bruce, and, oddly enough, it was an ungracious, sallow countenance, with eyes rather close-set. At first sight his heart contracted with a sudden fear that this might actually be Sheila, returned to work here for her living. The woman's harsh, unmodulated voice, when she spoke, came to his ears like a reprieve. She was called Miss Luncan, and she hadn't seen or heard of Sheila Burns for more than a year.

And as for the third expedient—who reads "personals," anyhow?

V

SHEILA had not gone far. She had taken a furnished room in a lodging-house in Brooklyn, and had rented a typewriter. Every few days she went to the office of a public stenographer, who was an old friend, and brought home work enough to keep her busy and to keep her alive.

She might have found a good position in New York, but only at the risk of encountering Bruce; though the risk would have been a faint one, she was not ready to face it. She had been strong enough to cut herself off from him, but she could not tell what she might do under pressure of his persuasion. She had little doubt that he would try to persuade her. Her only course was the one she had mapped out for herself—complete disappearance, utter and unbroken silence.

She was not particularly religious, or particularly artistic, or particularly literary, and she knew that she would never love another man. The one impersonal interest she had—philanthropic and social work—might betray her to a meeting with Bruce, at whose side she had learned what she knew. She dared not even take a class at a settlement, for fear of being hailed by some chance visitor as Mrs. Cary.

One evening, as she walked home with a bundle of manuscripts for typing, she read a terrible head-line over the war news in a paper. She rebuked herself for discontent and selfishness. Bruce was well and happy; that should be enough for her. She had bought the newspaper to read of men killed in battle, to think of their wives, and to feel ashamed of herself. But when she had climbed to her unattractive room she skimmed the pages carelessly, creased them at an angle, and—caught the paper close under her eyes again.

"Bruce Cary blind again," she read. "Cure only temporary—condition now hopeless." A dozen lines below this heading retold the terrible story in a few more words.

She read the item over and over, her eyes shifting with incredulous dismay from the

final sentence to the head-line again each time she finished it. She dropped the newspaper at last and closed her eyes, feeling sick with pity for him, sick with anger at the fate that had sent him for further torment a brief and tantalizing interval of sight.

Her own sacrifice, her own loneliness and suffering, showed now as wasted and futile effort; at the cost of blood from her heart she had only given him one pang the more to bear. There had been no necessity for her to go away from Bruce, there could be no reason now why she should not return to him. He must be needing, missing her at every turn! She remembered the pressure of his hands on hers in his worst hours; and what hour that she had ever passed through beside him could be comparable to the blackness of the prison that had closed on him again forever?

Sheila got into her hat and coat with fingers that were slow through haste and trembling. She clutched at her gloves and forgot to put them on as she walked two long blocks through sharp winter air to the subway station. She didn't hear the din of the train, as she sat in a corner of the half-empty car in a sort of trance, the words of the newspaper item repeating themselves over and over again in her ears.

"In the library, ma'am," said the butler, in answer to her eager question.

She ran past him, straight to Bruce. He was deep in a black-leather armchair beside a fire whose red coals she knew he could not see.

"It's I, Bruce! It's Sheila!" She sent her voice before her as she hurried down the long room to his side. She dropped across his knees, tried to pull his head down to her shoulder. "Ah, it's too cruel, dearest! It breaks my heart!"

In her own ears her voice seemed to sing. She was at home again, he was hers again! She knew that she would have died to give Bruce his eyes; but as fate would have it this way, she was deeply and selfishly happy. Her heart was not broken, but mending fast, passionately though she might try to deny it.

Bruce folded his arms around her in a close, firm clasp. His heart was pounding

furiously; each beat hurt him like a blow. He knew what he must do, and how difficult it would be, and that each moment he put it off took from his power to do it triumphantly. But first—

He pushed blindly for her mouth, found it, and through a long minute kissed his dream Sheila farewell. Then he raised his head, took a quick, short breath, and opened his eyes.

Line for line, curve for curve, but lovelier; broad-browed, sweet-lipped, rosy from his kiss, it was the dream Sheila that lay in his arms! For a while he stared down at her with a sense of enraptured unreality, as the prince who kissed the dragon must have stared at the princess that the dragon changed to. Surely enchantment had been no less at work here!

Then illuminating memories began to trickle back to him. It was she herself who had described her appearance to him, who had insisted on her fatal plainness when his scruple against robbing her of normal happiness had threatened to stand between them. She had simply lied, having the intuition to see that only so could she gain her end.

It was less easy to explain the vision that had come to him and remained with him, as if photographed through closed eyelids, of Sheila's true loveliness. Was it a miracle of love, or had some chance memory of her glimpsed beauty, kept out of the upper layer of consciousness by his loyalty to

Dorothea, stayed with him to fit itself naturally to the musical, girlish voice that was only another expression of the same personality?

Too thoroughly satisfied with the result to wonder greatly over causes, Bruce kissed her again—this time with a sureness of direction that made Sheila fling up a hand to push him from her, and stare rather wildly.

"Why, you—can *see!*" she cried, looking into eyes which beyond any question held the faculty of vision.

"And can you only love a blind man, Sheila?" he asked. "Because, if that is so, I can go back to the hospital and be *made* blind!"

"Bruce!" she clamored. "That newspaper notice—and you had your eyes shut till just now—was it a *trick?*"

"Wasn't it a good one?" he countered triumphantly. "I thought of it when I caught myself wishing I were in the dark again, if that would bring you back. No sooner had I thought that than I realized that it *would* bring you back, and probably nothing short of it would. Talk of tricks—you lovely liar!"

"But you don't *need* me!" She tried to break free from him.

"Oh, don't I?" he murmured, holding her tighter. "Is there only that one sort of need? Don't *need* you? Why, I love you! Sheila, aren't there two of us that have been blind?"
